



CASE STUDY

Women Find Strength and Lead



Zaina Tabu is now a respected local leader.

Challenge

Zaina Tabu, 43, loves her ten and twelve year old nieces, Nehema and Zura, as if they were her daughters. Tabu is separated from her husband and the girls live with their aunt because their mother was unable to provide for them.

Tabu is shy and never imagined herself as a leader, insisting, "I am not educated so never thought I could lead others. I always thought one had to have academic qualifications to lead." Zaina continues, "And I hated public speaking."

Tabu is part of a majority since females comprise 70 percent of the world's 1.3 billion poor, many lacking access to health services, education, and income. Tabu insists, "Women leaders are important because we give voice to the concerns of marginalized women, many of whom are battered by their husbands and mistreated by their relatives."

Initiative

Tabu is one of more than 17,000 women in East and Central Africa whose leadership skills have been strengthened through USAID East Africa's Roads to a Healthy Future (ROADS II) project. ROADS brings vulnerable women from local communities together with public and private sector leaders who are managing health and social services. Working collaboratively to assess their community's health needs and design and implement HIV prevention and treatment programs, these women receive the mentoring that helps them become leaders.

Results

Tabu's leadership path began in 2003 when a nonprofit supported by ROADS established a group in Busia, Uganda, a dusty, bustling transport corridor town where she lives. BAMACODA (the Bajjabasaga Marachi Community Development Association), helps women develop skills to talk about HIV and maternal health issues with their peers, links

them to HIV services, and helps them to save income and establish small businesses.

Tabu became involved with the group's community theater rehearsals. "I didn't think I could manage, but after the performance {on health and HIV/AIDS} everyone was congratulating me and that gave me the courage to do it again." Zaina and other women became popular performers and the BAMACODA women were soon perceived by the community and local council as prospective leaders.

Tabu was nominated and elected by the community to the local War Veterans Council. Today Tabu is responsible for mobilizing village women, interacting with her peers daily and representing their concerns at council meetings. Her advocacy has helped particularly those affected by gender-based violence.

"I see myself as a leader among leaders, both women and men," she says. "And I am proud that even people in the community who are educated see me as their leader."